

**Saint Matthew United Church of Christ  
Baltimore City Local Landmark  
Designation Report**



**The Commission for Historical and Architectural  
Preservation**

**April 25, 2006**

The Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation has the responsibility of recommending to the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore the adoption of ordinances designating districts and landmarks within the limits of the City of Baltimore, having special historical, architectural, educational, cultural, social or community significance, interest, or value as Baltimore City Historic Districts or Landmarks, thereby necessitating their preservation and protection. In making its recommendation, the Commission shall give appropriate consideration to the following standards. In reaching its decision, the Commission shall clearly state which standards have been applied.

A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:

1. dates from a particular period having a significant character, interest, or value, as part of the development, heritage, or culture of the City of Baltimore; or
2. is associated with the life of an outstanding historical person or persons; or
3. is the site of an historic event with a significant effect upon the cultural, political, economic, social, or historic heritage of the City of Baltimore; or
4. is significant of the architectural period in which it was built and has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, method of construction, or engineering, or is the notable work of a master builder, designer, engineer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or
5. contributes information of historical, cultural, or social importance relating to the heritage of the community; or
6. has yielded, or may be likely to yield, archeological information important in history or prehistory.

Saint Matthew United Church of Christ meets **criterion one** as an excellent example of a religious congregation that has contributed to the development, heritage, and culture of Baltimore City. The congregation formed in Jonestown in 1852 and moved to 2320 Mayfield Avenue in 1929. Currently, the congregation worships at the church. For over 150 years the congregation has served the spiritual and social needs of many Baltimore residents.

The church also meets **criterion four** as a superb example of English Gothic style architecture and as a work of prominent architects Buckler and Fenhagen. Designed in the late 1920s, the church was built over two periods. In 1929, the school, social hall and the church tower were constructed. Twenty-two years later in 1952, architect Harold Wagner of Philadelphia was hired to build the main church, closely following the original design of Buckler and Fenhagen.

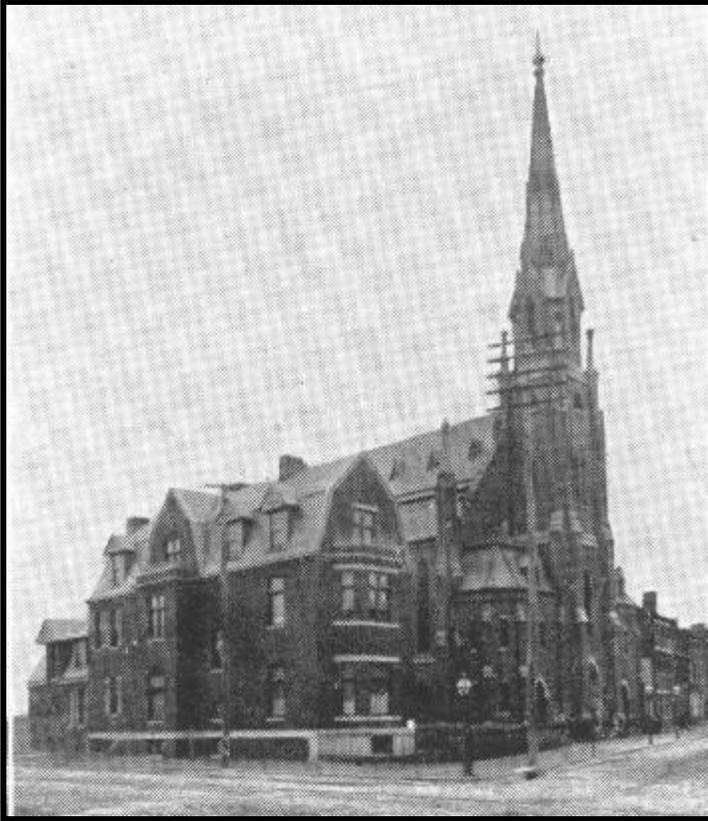
## History

The German Evangelical Lutheran St. Matthew's Congregation, one of several former names of the current congregation, was founded in 1852, breaking away from Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. The new congregation embraced both Lutheran and Reformed teachings, and all church activities were conducted in German. Between 1853 and 1854 the congregation constructed a simple, elegant Greek Revival church on Central Avenue between Baltimore and Fayette streets (now owned by the St. Vincent de Paul Society and part of the Jonestown local historic district).



Built in 1853 by builder Jacob Yeisly as the St. Matthew's German Evangelical Lutheran Church

In 1871 this church was sold to the St. Wenceslaus Catholic parish, a Bohemian congregation, and St. Matthew's congregation began construction on an imposing Gothic Revival style building. This church stood at the northeast corner of Central Avenue and Fayette Street. For this church, the pastor obtained three cannons that were captured in the Franco-Prussian War and hired McShane Bell Foundry of Baltimore to melt down the cannons and turn them into bells. Later, they were installed into the current structure.

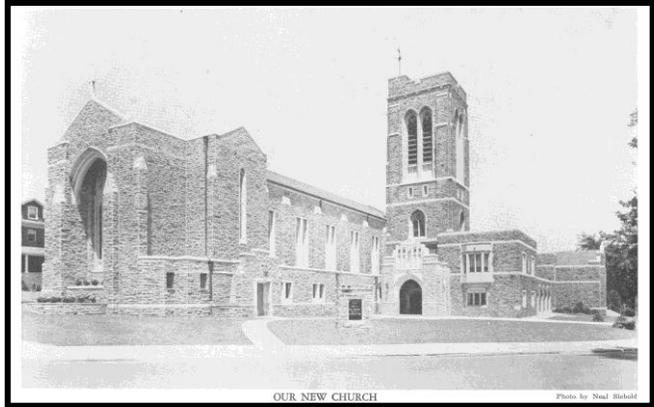
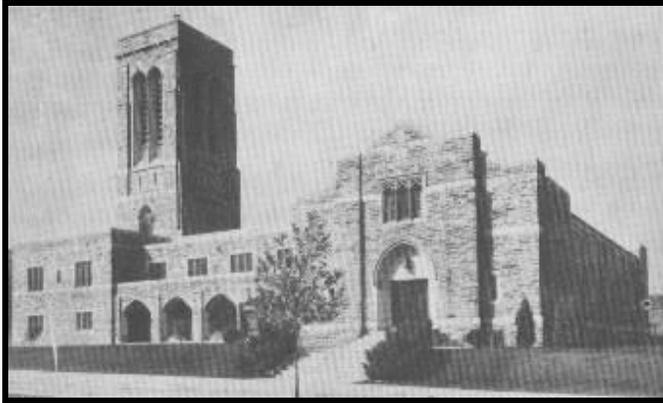


Dedicated on April 27, 1873, the church was designed by Edward Lupus architect. The church bells on the right, now installed at 2320 Mayfield Avenue, have a German inscription which says (translation) “25 hundred weight of this metal is from captured French Canons given by the German Kaiser Wilhelm to the St. Matthew Congregation, 1874.”

During the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, English-speaking services and activities were being introduced into the church curriculum. Concurrently, the church expanded its Sunday school, Missionary Society, Lady Aids Society, and its Young People’s Society. St. Matthews was a center of the German Lutheran community in East Baltimore.

By the late 1910s, however, the congregation had dispersed throughout the City, and a large percentage of the congregation moved into Northeast Baltimore along the Harford Road corridor. In 1928, the congregation bought a lot of land in the Mayfield neighborhood and hired architects Buckler and Fenhagen to prepare drawings for a new church. On June 16, 1929, because of financial constraints, the congregation decided to construct only the church tower, the Sunday school building, and the social hall. Services began in the social hall on Christmas Day, 1929. It would be another 23 years before they would build the sanctuary.

The congregation grew from approximately 700 members in 1935 to 1,200 members in 1952. The vast majority of the congregation lived within a radius of two miles from the church, and church activities occurred seven days a week. In 1943, the congregation began a building campaign to finish constructing their church, and the cornerstone was laid in an impressive service on November 4, 1951. The sanctuary was completed with supervision from architect Harold Wagner who closely followed the original designs of Buckler and Fenhagen.



Original photographs of St. Matthew United Church of Christ. The image on the left shows the social hall, the school and the tower shortly after they were built in 1929. The image on the right shows the main church structure shortly after it was constructed in 1952.

## History of St. Matthew United Church of Christ

St. Matthew's church is a wonderful example of English Gothic Revival style, also known as the *revived* Gothic Revival style that was popular in the 1920s. Built with local quarried stone, bands of limestone accentuate the building's different levels and highlight the triple multi-paned casement windows. The social hall's main entrance fronts Norman Avenue. A projecting middle bay highlights the limestone gothic-arched main entrance and showcases a prominent multi-paneled wooden door. A triple window with tracery-like detailing sits directly above the main entrance to the social hall.

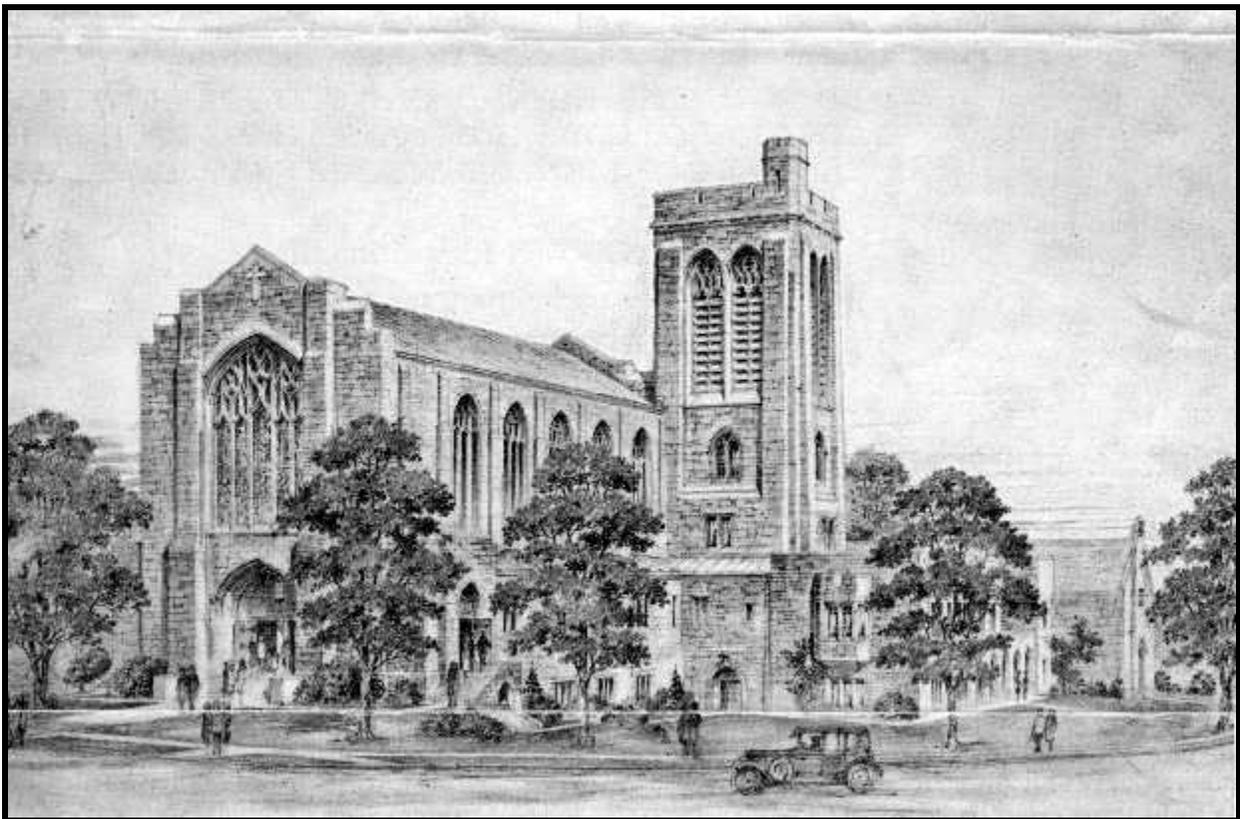
An arcade of pointed gothic arches connects the main social hall with the church tower and offices. A second story, fenestrated with a row of triple multi-paned casement windows, sits back from the arcade. The squared-off tower, accentuated with two elongated gothic-arched windows, is set back from Norman Avenue. Built in 1929, the tower houses the original bells that were made for the 1873 church.

The main compound-gothic-arched entrance, capped with an intricately decorative pediment, sits on the south façade of the tower. Originally, Buckler and Fenhagen designed the main entrance of the church to front Mayfield Avenue, but in 1952 the altar was placed on the south end of the main church structure, consequently relocating the main entrance to the north side of the sanctuary. Spectacular stained glass windows march down the east and west facades of the sanctuary. The altar area is highlighted with a floor-to-ceiling stained glass window. On the north façade in the balcony area one of the circular stained glass window from the 1873 church was installed. The church sanctuary is reminiscent of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson's First Baptist Church of Pittsburg completed in 1909.

Buckler and Fenhagen were prominent Baltimore architects who influenced the architecture of Baltimore, designing many school buildings and hospitals in and around Baltimore. Their masterpiece is City College, Baltimore's best example of Collegiate Gothic style architecture. Saint Mathew United Church of Christ superbly captures the English Gothic Revival style, which is very similar to the Collegiate Gothic style. George Corner Fenhagen, born in 1884, was raised in Baltimore. In 1903-05, he attended the University of Pennsylvania where studied architecture. In 1905 he worked for Pell and Corbett in New York City, and in 1906-07 he attended the American Academy in Rome. In 1911, he became the

assistant consulting architect for the Philippines. He returned to Baltimore in 1916 and helped to form the firm Sill, Buckler, and Fenhagen. In 1923, he became an architecture professor with Paul Cret at the University of Pennsylvania while still being active in his firm.

Riggin Buckler, born in 1883, graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1904; subsequently, he attended MIT and worked for McKim, Mead and White for three years. In 1910, he helped to found the architectural firm of Sill and Buckler, and in 1921 it was renamed Buckler and Fenhagen. The firm has designed many prominent buildings in Baltimore including City College, Charles Carroll of Carrollton High School, Greenmount Cemetery Mausoleum, and many houses in the Homeland and Guilford neighborhoods. With their design of City College and St. Matthew Church, Buckler and Fenhagen became Baltimore's best practitioners of the *revived* Gothic Revival style that became popular in the 1910s.



The original Buckler and Fenhagen drawing of the church.



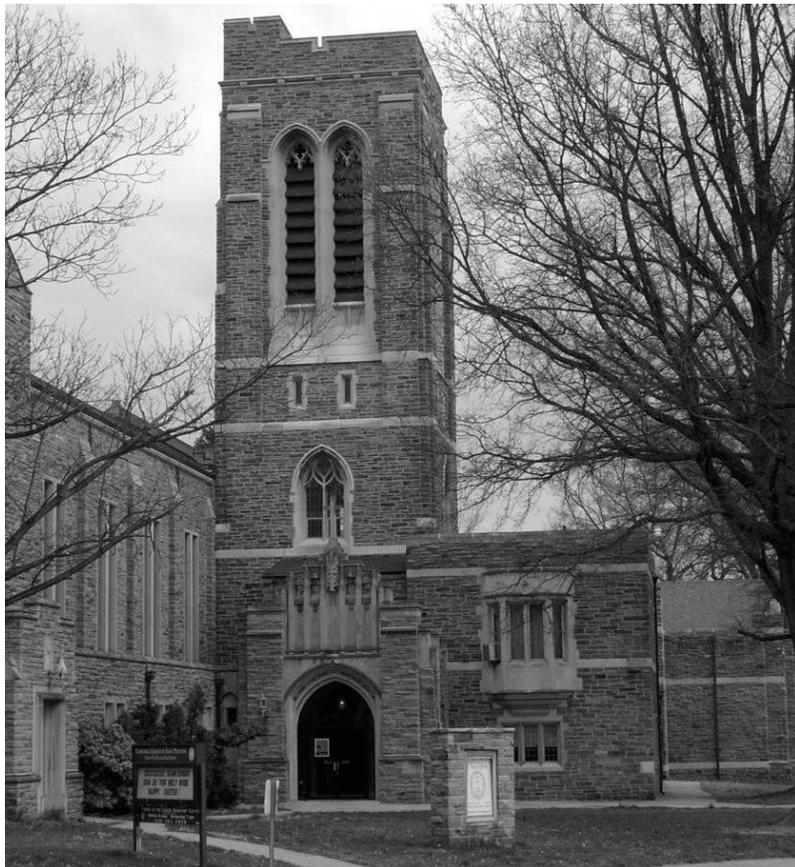
View of main sanctuary



A photograph of the stained glass circular window that was removed from the 1873 church and reinstalled in the north end of the current church.



A current photograph of the Norman Street Façade.



Main entrance to the church